

THE GROWTH OF THE AIRPLANE
AS A WEAPON OF WAR

by

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SUMMARY

This thesis deals primarily with the use of the airplane as a weapon of war. It starts with the invention and goes on from its first appearance in a war to its present day might. Mingled throughout its growth are my own ideas and opinions on disputes which have arisen about the potentialities of the airplane and on its effects on the human mind.

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Back in 1903 two brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, concluded experiments on their new invention. It was the airplane. Hardly could they then realize the potentialities of their creative genius. The thought that it would bring the world closer together or that it would bring death and misery to millions never entered their minds.

As a weapon of war, the airplane made its first showing in World War I. Then, the airplane had not yet reached the technical perfection which it was due to achieve several decades later, and its possibilities as an important offensive weapon were not yet seen. However, it was soon to emerge the most effective weapon in the world.

For a long time after the close of the war, the potential power of the airplane was disputed in military and political circles. The question was: " Could precision aerial bombing be effective in reducing the military strength of an enemy to a point where it would decide the result of a war? " One school of thought maintained that while the airplane could undeniably prove valuable as a supplementary weapon, it could never become

the deciding factor. At the same time, the so-called experts claimed that only large concentrations of men, ships, and fire power could bring the final victory. On the other hand, we have those who thought as the late Billy Mitchell did, that the airplane would in time become the greatest single factor in deciding the outcome of a war. If this line of thought had been fostered then, we would have been able to meet the enemy on an equal footing from the beginning.

Then came the fall of '39. The airplane made its real debut. As the Luftwaffe winged its deadly way over Poland, a new phase of terrorism and destruction was initiated. It was no longer a haphazard undertaking with doubtful results as in 1917, but a carefully planned, skillfully executed method of destruction. The effects of the bombing raids were not only in physical form, but mental as well. The ominous drone of the approaching planes brought terror into the hearts of those who were about to face them. A feeling of helplessness arose within them, what could they do against so powerful and deadly a mechanism. Although we know they are ours, even we in the United States get a cold chill when a squadron of planes rumble overhead. The results of this debut were

so devastating that the invincibility of Goering's air armade became a legend which terrorized Holland, Belgium, Norway, and France. It was then that the effectiveness of the airplane was fully realized.

Twice in the present conflict, this lack of foresight into the might of the airplane has almost brought defeat to the Allies. First, it was on the beach of Dunkirk, where the British and French Expeditionary Forces were miraculously evacuated under constant attack from the Nazi Air Force. The second onslaught was the historic battle of London.

We too in the United States soon felt the weight of enemy air power, when the Japs made their treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor, Wake, and Midway.

However, the tide has now changed, we have taken over the war in the air. Everyday we read in the newspapers of the waves and waves of Allied bombers that are shuttling back and forth over Germany, Italy, and France. The news-reels in the movies show us how air power has levelled Tarawe and reduced Cassino to mere shambles.

Now , with the thoughts of invasion looming in the near future, the airplane will take an even greater role. It is rather obvious to see that the Germans have

been building a wall of steel on the French coast for the last few years, and it even more obvious that only tons tons of high explosives dropped from the air will melt it down. It will be a tough nut to crack, and the airplane is capable of doing it. However, only time will tell.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The information used in this thesis was obtained through daily contact with newspapers and radio, and enlarged upon by my own ideas and opinions.

